

## Myths About Aging

**Myth: More than half of all older people have memory problems or dementia.**

**Fact:** The majority of older people, while they may sometimes be forgetful, have brains that work normally. Even at extreme old age, less than 30 percent of people have dementia. A person's mental ability has little to do with age – Ben Franklin, for instance, helped write the Constitution at the age of 81.

**Myth: All five senses – hearing, sight, taste, smell and touch – are lost with age.**

**Fact:** It is true that age can affect all of the senses. However, everyone is different, and some people lose their senses more than others. You may have a resident who is blind at the age of 65, and another who can still read the newspaper without glasses at 102 years old.

**Myth: People get weaker with old age.**

**Fact:** It is true that muscle is usually lost with age, and the older person may feel tired and weaker than in younger years. However, studies have shown that exercise can build muscle at any age. Many older people keep themselves fit and strong. And those who don't may simply need to pace themselves and rest often.

**Myth: Older people are unhappy much of the time.**

**Fact:** The majority of older people actually say they are happy most of the time. If an older person is unhappy, he or she may have always been unhappy. Age doesn't change that.

**Myth: At least 10 percent of older people live in nursing homes.**

**Fact:** Only 5 percent of older people live in nursing homes. In fact, more older people live in their own homes than do younger people.

**Myth: Older people can't learn new things.**

**Fact:** It may take longer for an older person to learn something new, but unless the person has dementia, new learning is always possible.

**Myth: Older people can't adapt to change.**

**Fact:** Older people *can* get used to change; they just need time and to be given good reasons for the change.

**Myth: Older people tend to be pretty much alike.**

**Fact:** No two people are the same. In fact, people grow even more different as they age. Each person, young or old, is an individual.

Source: Adapted from Palmore's Facts on Aging Quiz, cited in "Aging Sensitivity," by Patricia M. Kline, *Preparing Participants for Intergenerational Interaction*, edited by Melissa O. Hawkins, MS, Francis A. McGuire, PhD and Kenneth F. Backman, PhD, The Haworth Press, Inc., 10 Alice St., Binghamton, NY 13904-1580.